

NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

Topic: Suspected Encephalitis Case In Franklin County
Contact: Kelly Shannon
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The Mississippi State Department of Health announced today that what appears to be Mississippi's fourth case of LaCrosse (LAC) encephalitis has occurred in a four-year-old child from rural Franklin County.

Health officials have confirmed two cases of mosquito-borne LaCrosse encephalitis already this year: one in May from Marion County and one in June from Noxubee County. One other probable case, from George County, is still pending confirmation.

"Most cases of LAC encephalitis occur in children less than 16 years of age," said State Department of Health Epidemiology Nurse Sheryl Hand.

"Most people who get the virus have no symptom or sign of illness. An individual with LAC encephalitis might have fever, headache, nausea, vomiting or drowsiness. Illness in young children can lead to seizures, coma, and paralysis."

A virus transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito causes LAC encephalitis. Not all mosquitoes are infected, but health officials stress the importance of avoiding mosquito bites during the summer months.

"We have no effective treatment for LAC encephalitis," said Hand. "Prevention is the only measure for anyone to take."

According to State Department of Health Medical Entomologist Dr. Jerome Goddard, eliminating mosquito breeding grounds is one of the most effective steps to take during the spring and summer months.

"The mosquito vectors of LaCrosse encephalitis breed exclusively in artificial containers or tree holes," said Goddard.

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Common breeding sites for mosquitoes vary from artificial containers to storm sewers, catch basins, and poorly drained street gutters or ditches. Goddard suggests these prevention steps:

- Destroy or dispose of tin cans, old tires, and artificial water containers
- Empty plastic wading pools at least once a week and store indoors when not in use
- Change the water in bird baths and plant pots or drip trays at least once each week
- Store boats covered or upside down, or remove rainwater weekly
- Remove tree stumps that may hold water
- Stock ornamental ponds with top-feeding minnows
- Place tight covers over cisterns, cesspools, septic tanks, fire barrels, rain barrels, and tubs where water is stored
- Keep rain gutters unclogged and flat roofs dry.

Mississippians can also reduce mosquito contact by avoiding unnecessary outdoor activity during evening and night time hours, when mosquitoes are most active. If outdoors, one should wear such protective clothing such as long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and socks.

Goddard also recommends using mosquito repellants containing the active ingredient DEET, according to label directions only.

“Concentrations of DEET in the range of 15 to 60 percent are effective against mosquitoes. Nobody needs to use 100 percent DEET products,” said Goddard.

LAC encephalitis generally affects rural areas more than towns or cities. The normal cycle of the virus that causes LAC encephalitis occurs between mosquitoes and small mammals, but under certain conditions the virus can be transmitted to humans by certain species of mosquitoes. Person-to-person transmission does not occur.